

Fall Away by thedisgruntledone

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Summary:

It seems simple enough. If Will can't keep himself from going to the Upside Down when sleeping, then someone needs to be around to wake him up before it happens. Even he has to admit that he can't stop sleeping forever.

Fall Away

Author's Note:

Takes place shortly after "Might Not Be That Bad" but can be read as a standalone.

Will sits on his bed. The lights are off because he doesn't want to alert his mom to the fact that he's awake. If she knew that she would wonder why, and then the questions would start. After the questions would come the worry, and that is the last thing that Will wants. His mom has just started to relax again. The permanent bags under her eyes are disappearing and she laughs a lot more. Part of that is Hopper, he knows; even though both he and Jonathan had had reservations about him Will can't deny that he he's actually been good for all of them. And of course they all adore El.

Will never really missed his dad when he was gone; the man had never been much of a dad to begin with. The two of them had never seen eye to eye on anything; his dad had been disgusted by Will's drawing and love of science. He'd wanted him to play a sport, to be rough and brutal and his softness had prodded him into asking often if Will were some sort of fag. His mom would shush him and drag Will away, and his dad would call after him that that was why he was such a sissy; Joyce was turning his kid into some kind of queer and he wouldn't stand for it.

Then the fighting would start, and Will would go to his room and put his hands over his ears, trying to drown out the noise. It was more of a relief than anything else when his dad finally left, which he knew must be awful. It made him try harder with his dad than he might otherwise have done. Let him get hurt for longer.

But with Hopper it's different. He's not the greatest dad ever, and sometimes he and El have arguments that get so loud that Will's mom kicks them both out of the house, but he never makes Will feel like he's looking at him and seeing a little queer who can't do anything right. Hopper listens, although El says he wasn't always as good about it as he is now. Best of all, he makes his mom feel safe. That's not something she's told him, exactly. He can just tell.

So yeah. Part of it is Hopper. The rest, though, is her finally coming to believe that it's all over. That after everything that they went through before - everything that started with Will's disappearance and ended with El exhausting herself and her power almost to the point of death - they can finally have some peace. Will can't bring himself to prove her wrong, even if it means figuring out this newest problem without her or Hopper's help.

There's a soft tap at his door, and then El slips inside.

"Asleep," she whispers, her voice nearly soundless. Will doesn't need to hear her to know what she's saying, though, and he nods, then presses the talk button on his walkie twice. Two faint clicks come back; Mike is on his way.

El sits next to him on the bed, close enough that their arms brush. Will leans more firmly into her, taking comfort from her presence. She reaches out and grabs his hand.

When Mike taps at the window Will lets El get up and let him in. He wants to be the one to do it, but he's trying to get past that. He can't quite keep himself from watching, though, and the smiles that the two of them give each other make his chest hurt. He looks down at this hands, which are twisting together in his lap, and focuses on making them still.

A pair of jean clad legs moves to stand in front of him, and Mike puts a hand on his shoulder. Will looks at him, his stomach jumping as it always does. Mike looks worried. "Are you sure you want to do this?"

Will wishes that he were a little less concerned about him. It's not Mike's fault, but it really only makes things so much harder.

He gives him a smile anyway and nods. "Yeah, I'm sure. Are you?"

Mike grins back. "If you are we are," he says, turning his head to include El, who nods.

"Yes," she says. She settles into the chair at his desk and smiles at him. "Me first." Mike settles down on the sleeping bag Will has placed next to his bed.

Will nods. "Okay," he says. He lays down, turning on his side so that he can see them both. "Thanks," he says. He takes a deep breath and closes his eyes.

He's exhausted. He didn't know that it was possible to be this tired all the time and still function, but that is what he has been doing for weeks. He figures he'll drop off to sleep immediately, but instead he can't relax. His entire body is taught on the bed, his breathing light and shallow, eyelids ready to spring open at the first hint of sleep. He trusts El and Mike, trusts that they will not both fall asleep and leave him to the Upside Down, but he's too used to trying to stay awake by now. His body automatically starts to freak out when he closes his eyes.

He lays there for what feels like forever. Long enough for Mike to fall asleep, at any rate; his breathing has gone deep and slow. He can't tell if El has joined him. He opens his eyes to check, and finds her looking at him with a small smile on her face. "Still here," she says. "Still awake." Will gives her a small nod and closes his eyes again, feeling a bit more relaxed. He is sure that he won't sleep, but he is no longer afraid that El will fall asleep on him.

Some time later he opens his eyes. No one is watching him this time; both El and Mike have fallen asleep. He peers over the bed to see them curled together like kittens. They're holding hands. He gives a heavy sigh and looks at his clock, but the power must have gone out because it's blinking twelve a.m. at him over and over. It hurts his eyes and he unplugs it.

It isn't until he's in the kitchen getting a glass of water that he realizes that the sound he's hearing isn't in his mind. He tilts his head a bit to listen. It sounds a bit like the hiss of a tape when it reaches the end of a song, before the tape itself runs out and stops the player. Just as he's thinking it, he hears a click. It's from Jonathan's room.

He's standing in front of Jonathan's door and reaching for the handle when he finally understands that he is dreaming. He never got out of bed; he's probably sleeping right now while El (or Mike, if it's his turn) watches over him, checking for any signs that he might be fading into the Upside Down. He breathes a sigh of relief. He still doesn't feel right, this is probably going to be one of those nasty

nightmares that starts out fine and then takes a sharp turn into the terrifying, but he can handle that. He'll wake up sweaty and shaking, sure, but at least he'll wake up in his bed, relatively safe. *And hey*, he thinks as his hand turns the doorknob and he slowly, slowly pushes Jonathan's door open, *at least I got some real sleep before –*

The thought dies in his head when the door swings open. Jonathan isn't in the room. In his place is a Demogorgon. Will tries to scream but nothing comes out. The Demogorgon has its head turned away, but Will sees it start to look over at him. He shuts the door and flees back to his room, and now he's screaming, yes, screaming loud enough to bring the house down, screaming so loudly that surely it must echo into the waking world. Any second now El or Mike will shake him awake and he will be free of this dream. Any second.

Jonathan's door explodes outward just as Will reaches his room. The Demogorgon is shrieking; the sound of it dwarfs his own screams and hurts his ears. Will does not look back, but runs into his room and shuts the door, leaning against it and staring at the space next to his bed. El and Mike are gone, and he realizes with dismay that he is in the Upside Down. The Demogorgon out in the house is real, and if it catches him, he will die. He looks around wildly, trying to think, but terror is making it hard. His eyes alight on the window and he flings himself at it, knowing he has seconds, knowing that if it's locked in this world then he is going to die screaming in the distorted reflection of his room.

The window is unlocked, and it slides up without a sound. He can hear the Demogorgon in the hall, moving more slowly now that he's out of sight. His door isn't far from Jonathan's; he needs to go now. He slides out of the window and runs.

His bike is in the garage; he cannot get to it. He is going to have to go it on foot. He sprints the first block as fast as he can, spurred on by fear, his feet not even touching the ground, but soon he has to stop. It's harder to get air in this place; he breathes in great whooping gasps that will surely lead any beasts that may be about straight to him, but he can't help it. Still, he thinks that he might be far enough away from the Demogorgon to get out of here. He concentrates, willing himself back to the world he lives in.

Nothing happens.

Will swallows hard. Anxiety settles in his chest, ready to turn into full blown panic. He keeps it down, but barely. Butterflies dancing in his stomach, he tries again.

Nothing.

Will's chest tightens, and all of his limbs go loose and watery. His breath starts to wheeze and his eyes water. He thinks that he might throw up. A white haze descends over his vision, and he starts running again, blindly, the ringing in his ears keeping him from knowing if anything is actually following behind.

A piercing cramp in his side is what finally stops him. It clears his head a little, too, and he finds that he can think again, and what he thinks is that he's too tired to get back to the world. That is all. He wore himself out with terror and running, not to mention the lack of decent sleep he's been getting lately. He's just depleted his recourses a bit, and once he gets a bit of rest he can try again. This isn't the first time that it's been hard to get back to the world; all he's ever needed to do is wait. He *knows* this.

He gets moving before his heart rate has gone completely back to normal, knowing that if he doesn't get somewhere safe soon it won't matter if he has the strength to get out or not; this place is full of horrible things. Crawly things, slithery things. Things that thrived in the darkness and want nothing more than to devour anyone foolish enough to cross their path.

He takes the route to his old house without thinking about it, his ears primed for sound, eyes darting rapidly back and forth. He is forced off of the road once when a horde of troglodytes passes by, but otherwise the way is remarkably clear. He is grateful for this; he doesn't know if he can run anymore. Then, finally, his old place looms in the distance and he breathes a sigh of relief. If he can get to the clubhouse that he and Jonathon built so long ago, he thinks he might have a chance. He can hunker down in there for a while and when he is rested, he can try willing himself back out of here.

After what seems like forever, he sees the shape of the old house

looming in the distance, and he breathes a sigh of relief that sounds almost like a sob. He's very tired now, and he's achy and feels hot, like he did when he came down with the flu two years ago. He hopes that isn't happening again.

He intends to bypass the house completely – even in the real world it doesn't hold many good memories for him anymore – but his feet don't listen and instead carry him through the front door. He finds himself smiling a bit, thinking that it would be nice to sleep in a bed instead of on the floor, but he knows that he can't. Still, it is a bit quicker to cut through the house, so he doesn't start to feel concerned until he finds himself turning down the hall rather than continuing forward, towards the back door.

And now he can hear faint noises coming from the closed doors that he's passing. Hissing noises from what would be his mom's old room, grunts and thumps from Jonathan's. He stops in front of his old door. There is a drawing of a Demogorgon fixed to it, only this Demogorgon is an astronomical size, like Gozilla. At its feet are the bodies of his friends, smashed and torn. One of its giant paws holds Mike, and its got his head shoved into its wide, gaping mouth. Will knows that the hand that drew this could only be his. He's always drawn well, and the details are very clear. He shudders.

From behind this door comes the sound of low laughter. Not the kind of laughter that he likes to hear, though; the kind that draws you in and makes you want to join the joke. No, this laughter is dark. It's the kind of laughter that makes you want to run and hide and hope that whatever the thing that can make that sound is somehow misses your hiding spot and passes you by. It goes on and on, crazily, and Will feels like he'll go crazy, too, and then they'll laugh together in this room forever. He feels fuzzy, disconnected. He watches his hand grasp the doorknob and turn it with only the vaguest curiosity, and in the back of his mind he begins to wonder if he made it to the clubhouse after all; if he's in there right now, curled up and sleeping and now having another very weird dream. It's only in dreams that your body refuses to obey the commands of your mind, after all, and his body has been ignoring his desire to get the hell out of here for a while now.

He pushes the door open.

He's ready for all manner of monster, so when he sees what is actually in there he actually laughs in sheer relief.

It's a kid.

Just a kid, his back turned to Will. He's wearing red-striped pajamas and his feet are bare, and now that the door is open he can tell that what he's been hearing is the sound of soft crying, not horrible laughter, and how could he have thought that? The sound is so clear. It's just a kid, another victim of the Upside Down.

"Hey, kid, you okay?" Will asks, stepping forward, into the room. The kid doesn't respond, but his crying gets louder. He's almost wailing he's crying so loud.

"It's okay," Will says, even though it isn't. But what else can he say? The boy is obviously terrified, so Will has to be the strong one. He takes another step forward then stops, frowning. He'd thought it was a little kid, littler than him, but now that he's a bit closer he can see that they're around the same height, possibly even the same age. The cries get even louder, and now the kid starts to wheeze a bit, unable to get enough of the thin air. His shoulders shake.

Will takes a final step. He's close enough to touch the boy now, and he raises a hand to do so...then stops. He'd thought that the kid's pajamas were striped red, but now he sees that they are blue, like his. And the back of the head that he is staring at looks awfully familiar, now that he thinks about it. He doesn't spend much time gazing at the back of his own head, it's true, but he knows that haircut, he *does*.

Now the odd dreaminess has left his mind, replaced by flat fear. He backs away quickly, wide eyes on the back of the thing's head. And now he can hear the laughter again, oh, it's awful, horrible, boring its way into his head and making it pound. He raises his hands to his ears to try and block it out, but it's so loud that he can't.

"Going somewhere?" the thing asks through the laughter, its voice garbled and *melting*, somehow, like wax off of a candle. "Don't you want to stay?"

It turns around, and Will cries out when he sees his own face, the eyes shadowed and hollow, the mouth drawn into an unpleasant grin.

“I’ve been waiting,” it says through that grin and as Will watches, horrified, the grin gets wider and wider – too wide for any normal face. “I’ve been waiting for you for *so long*.” It reaches towards him with fingers curved into claws, and although it hasn’t moved from the center of the room its arms are somehow long enough that the hands get him anyway, claws biting into his arms, and Will struggles but it’s strong, so strong, and despite his best efforts he’s brought closer and closer to that ugly, grinning face. “You’re mine now,” the thing with his face whispers, and then its mouth opens and all Will can see is teeth.

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El wakes Mike up at two in the morning by pushing on his shoulder. He rubs at his eyes and sits up, and she’s down on the bag and sleeping before he’s even gotten fully out of the way. He laughs a little, then looks over at Will. He’s completely knocked out, and Mike is glad. He hadn’t liked the look of him earlier; hadn’t liked the dark smudges under his eyes or the tired, drawn line of his mouth. He’d looked old and haggard, like his mom when he’d gone missing, and it hurt Mike to see it. He feels the now familiar twist in his gut as he looks at his sleeping face, and thinks that it really is unfair that this kind of stuff keeps happening to him.

He doesn’t fall asleep, but that doesn’t make him blame himself any less for what happens. He goes to the bathroom, is all. Just a quick trip, less than five minutes, but when he gets back Will has vanished. “Shit, *shit*,” he says, and shakes El awake.

First they look all over the house, quietly, telling themselves that Will probably just got up and was thirsty, or hungry; that he’s probably in the kitchen with a glass of water, and never mind the fact that he would never do that without letting whoever was watching know. But of course he isn’t there. He isn’t outside, or in the garage, and his bike is tilted against the wall where he’d left it the day before. Will is gone.

Mike feels sick. He keeps thinking of what he could have done to

prevent this. He could have had El stay awake for just five more minutes. Five measly little minutes. But he hadn't, and now Will is gone. Gone to the Upside Down, and what if something got him while he was there? What if one of the monsters he was so afraid of found him? Tears sting his eyes and he blinks them back angrily.

El touches his arm. He takes her hand gratefully. The sun is rising; they can hear people moving. Someone opens a cabinet in the kitchen; Ms. Byers starting breakfast. "We have to tell her," Mike says, voice very soft. El squeezes his hand and nods.

"Yes."

They walk out together, hand in hand. Mike knows that he's probably hurting El with how tightly he's squeezing, but she doesn't say anything and he can't let go. The hallway seems to stretch on forever, and when they get close to the kitchen Mike's gaze falls to his feet. He doesn't want to see Ms. Byers' face when he tells her what he's done. She'd thanked him, last time. Thanked him for being there for Will. He should have been there this time, too.

He's concentrating so hard on his feet that he doesn't notice that El's stopped until she tugs on his hand. He looks up, startled, and his mouth drops open.

"Will?"

Will grins at them from where he's sitting at the kitchen table, eating a bowl of cereal. "Morning," he says through a mouthful. "Want some?" He gestures to a box on the counter.

Mike shakes his head. "When did you get back?"

"Back? *Oh.*" Will puts his spoon down and sits back in his chair. "A couple of minutes ago. But don't worry, no one saw."

"Are you okay?"

"Yeah. It was no big deal." He shrugs and goes back to his cereal. Mike glances at El. She looks as surprised as he feels.

"But--"

“I said I’m *fine*,” Will snaps. “Look, I know how to stop from going back there, okay? I figured it out. It won’t be a problem anymore. So calm down and have some cereal.” He jumps up and goes to get them bowls.

Mike looks at El again. She’s watching Will, her brow furrowed, and Mike knows what she’s thinking, because he’s thinking it, too: this isn’t right. It’s too easy.

And despite what Will says, Mike has a horrible feeling that their problem is far from over.